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HOME DEMONSTRATION WORK IN MY HOME AND COMMUNITY

A radio talk by Mrs. Pearl M. Reifsteck, farm woman, Champaign County, Illinois, delivered in the Home Demonstration radio program, June 6, 1934 and broadcast by a network of 48 associate NBC radio stations.

During the past seven years, I have watched with a great deal of interest the growth of Home Economics Extension work in Illinois, especially in Champaign County. The fact that the number of women participating is steadily increasing, in spite of conditions, is significant. It tells a story. Extension is giving something that we need and want.

Women are enrolling because they receive expert advice on all matters pertaining to homemaking. In no other way can we secure the help of the county home adviser and various specialists in carrying on an organized program in Home Economics. It is a school for homemakers who are looking for up-to-date information.

Today, no woman should feel inferior because her educational advantages have been meager. Lack of development, because of environment, is not to be condemned, so long as she shows her inclination to be at her best in the position in which she is placed.

There was a time when I felt no need of participating in these activities because I thought that I could get practically the same benefits from magazines, books, and radio. It is true that much may be learned in this manner, but broadening, personal contact are always missing. Also, I found that reading and the radio do not always give one standards by which to judge the practices recommended. In Home Bureau, our county extension organization, we meet women whose interests are the same as ours, and often make many lasting friendships.

After all, it is not what we have that counts as much as what we do with what we have. In this work we are shown how to make the most of our possibilities.

Much of the good we gain is intangible and its value is difficult to estimate. We become more tolerant and understanding. Homemaking consists of a great deal more than keeping the house clean. A woman has a duty to herself. Her well-being and usefulness, the happiness of her family, depend to a large extent upon her health, mental poise, and good spirits.

Our county organization consists of twenty-three units, governed by a county executive board. One of its many duties is to select an adviser. She must be trained in home economics and have first-hand experience of rural life. She divides her visiting time equally among the units, helps to train leaders, holds consultations, and does many other things.

Each unit has its own officers. It also selects leaders who go to schools taught by University extension specialists and take the work back to their members. Each unit meets once a month in the afternoon.

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For some time the various Home Bureau units have been helping the Farm Bureau units put on their regular monthly meetings which are held at night. Our most worth while project carried on jointly by the two organizations has been "recreation." One reason for its success is because of the splendid co-operation between the Farm and Home Bureaus and their advisers, Mrs. Virginia Conn White and Mr. C. C. Burns.

This work has been carried on since April 1933. County leaders were chosen who attended the District Institutes. These, in turn, help train unit leaders, who carry on the work in their communities; two county recreation schools are held monthly, one for the rural youth group (aged 16 to 26), and the other for the adult group.

At the young peoples' training school, the attendance never averages less than 100 at a meeting. At least 75 men and women attend each adult training school. There is a period of folk dancing, then group singing and games, then folk dances again.

In most units, the recreation follows the regular Farm and Home Bureau meetings, in others the entire evening is devoted to it. Often there are as many as one hundred and fifty present. Last year, in our county, there were eighty-two community recreation meetings held with an attendance of seven thousand two hundred and eighty.

Even the majority of older people cannot resist joining in the fun in spite of stiff joints and extra pounds. Their games and folk dances promote grace and poise. This work is doing much to create a friendly feeling throughout the county.

Through Home Bureau work, I have become acquainted with many wonderful homemakers in my community, county, and over the state. Extension workers are making every effort to help us rural homemakers maintain a good standard of living on a reduced income. I wish publicly to pay tribute to their good work.

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